

Romans 5:1-8; 8:35-39
The Confirming of God's Love
But God commendeth his love toward us – v. 8

In our last communion service we considered Rom. 3:31 under the theme of *establishing the law*. *Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law*. It has occurred to me since that study that in Paul's epistle to the Romans a number of things are established.

The sinfulness of man is established. So we read in Ro 3:19 *Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God*.

In establishing the sinfulness of man Paul is taking the first necessary and essential step for establishing the gospel. So we read in 3:21,22 *But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe*.

Whenever I think of Paul's epistle to the Romans I tend to view it in terms of God's righteousness. Romans has been called by some *The Christian's Constitution*. We certainly find in this epistle more than any other the legal reasoning of Paul and we do well to study his reasoning if we would know the joy and peace that come to us on account of our justification.

But there is something else established in Romans also – something that we may not readily think about when we're studying this epistle to the Romans – something that is much more readily emphasized by other New Testament authors, especially the Apostle John – and that is the love of God through Christ.

When you think of the theme of God's love you usually find yourself thinking on John's writings. It is in John's gospel, after all, that we read *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life*. And when you read through John's epistles you find a very strong emphasis on Christ's love.

You might say that Paul approaches the gospel from the reasoned forensic perspective of the gospel and that John approaches the gospel from the more emotional and heart-warming perspective of the gospel. It would be wrong, however, to draw the distinctions between Paul and John to such a degree as to suggest that Romans has nothing to say about God's love or that John's epistles have nothing to say about the forensic or legal aspects of the gospel.

If any man sin, John writes in 1Jn. 2:1 we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Here is a blessed truth that enters into the legal realm of the gospel. We have an advocate. Isn't it good to know that we have an advocate for that time when we'll stand before God's throne? And isn't it a blessing to know that our Advocate is Jesus Christ the righteous and that our righteous advocate has satisfied Divine justice by being the propitiation for our sins?

So we have the legal perspective of the gospel found in John although that may not be the main thrust of his epistle. So likewise do we have such emotional and heart-warming truths in Romans as what we find in Rom. 5:8 *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

That word *commendeth* contains the same root word for the word *establish* that we have back in 3:31 with reference to establishing the law. This word has led Matthew Poole to write in his commentary that the meaning of God commending his love is God declaring or confirming his love by a certain sign and thus make it most conspicuous and illustrious. That certain and illustrious sign, whereby God confirms his love; is, of course, Christ dying for us. *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

This is not the first mention of the love of God in Romans. A few verses earlier in this same chapter in Rom. 5:5 *And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.* And later in this epistle Paul will ask the question and give an elaborate answer to it – Rom. 8:35 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*

This morning, in preparation for our time around the Lord's table I would like for us to think on this theme in Romans for just as surely as we establish the law by the gospel, it can also be said that: We Confirm God's Love by the Gospel

And this is what I would like to think upon this morning:

The Confirmation of God's Love

I. The Means Toward the Confirmation of God's Love

The means toward that confirmation of God's love consists in this truth – *he died for us. God commendeth his love toward us in that...he died for us.* Those are such simple words to read and part of the frustration that a preacher faces is that he cannot give any fuller or plainer meaning to them. I wish I could hammer the truth of these words into your hearts. My hope and prayer is that the reality of these words will in some measure reach your hearts. The words are plain and simple – simple enough for a child to understand and yet in this statement we find the strongest confirmation of God's love that Divine wisdom could conceive.

Spurgeon makes the point that this commendation of God's love comes to us in the form of a deed performed. God did not commend his love toward us in giving a lengthy oration on the subject of his love. No – God's love rose far above mere words. God's love is shown in this deed – *he died for us*.

I made reference a moment ago to that word *commend* – God *commendeth his love toward us*. Not only does this word contain the same root word for the word *establish* that we studied in our last communion service but in this particular text in Rom. 5:8 the word is a compound word which contains the word *establish* which is prefixed by the preposition which we translate *together*. So the text could read something like this: Together God established his love toward us. And I think the term *together* would take into account the persons of the trinity and make reference to their deeds. All three persons are involved in the love that God shows toward us. All three persons are involved in deeds that demonstrate that love.

The Father, of course, sent his only begotten Son. And Christ, the only begotten Son is the One who died for us. And it is the Holy Spirit that sheds this love abroad in our hearts. So we find within the entire God-head this demonstration or commendation together of love toward us. The entire God-head is the source from which this love flows.

And would you note the direction within this text. This is love commended *toward us*. God is the source of this love and we are the objects of this love. And so we read that *God commendeth his love toward us* and *Christ died for us*. This love, manifested by this deed has flowed toward us. And when we see and contemplate the truth of this love then it makes the conclusion irresistible that this world has been flooded by the love of God.

You might not think it to be so if you have no knowledge or appreciation of Christ. There are many even among those that name the name of Christ that have in mind other things if God would commend his love toward them. They think that the confirmation of God's love would leave the door open wide for sin. Or they think that the confirmation of God's love would mean giving to them more of the world's goods or ridding the world from the catastrophes that often come upon the world.

We know, of course, that this world was flooded by the waters of God's judgment in the days of Noah – but Noah and his family was spared – and why was he spared? He was spared because God had a purpose of grace and in keeping with that purpose of grace he would flood this world with a love that defies comprehension.

This is why we're given, in scripture, illustrations that invite us to try to comprehend this love. For example we're given a picture of redemption in Ezek. 47 where we read of the waters that proceed from the sanctuary. The prophet begins in water that is ankle deep and proceeds to water that is knee deep and then water that comes to the loins and at last waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over (v. 5).

These waters are described as healing streams that heal the nations, indeed, that heal everything they come into contact with. Is it not a fitting symbol for the love of Christ that provides healing to those that come into contact with it? We're healed from the disease of

sin. We're healed from that cold, hard, and bitter spirit that we once harbored against God. We're revived and refreshed in the healing streams of God's love and God's grace and God's mercy.

And this healing stream flows to us because Christ died for us. See the stream of blood and water flow from his pierced side and behold in such a sight a love that defies comprehension – a love whose breadth and length and depth and height we will spend all eternity striving to take in.

Hear the message that the symbols of communion are meant to convey to you this morning. The bread, the emblem of Christ's broken body and the cup, the symbol of his shed blood say to us by way of reminder that *God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.*

We see, then, the means through which this love is confirmed. May the Holy Spirit himself stamp it on our hearts. Consider with me next:

II. The Marvel of This Confirmation of God's Love

To think on the simple and sublime truth that God commended his love for us by dying for us is a marvel in and of itself. But the marvel of that confirmation of love is all the more magnified when we take into account that it was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us.

Listen to the words of Spurgeon on this point. He writes: *Let us for a moment consider what sort of sinners many of us have been, and then we shall see it was marvelous grace that Christ should die for men – not as penitents, but as sinners. Consider how many of us have been continual sinners. We have not sinned once, nor twice, but ten thousand times. Our life, however upright and moral it has been, is stained by a succession of sins. If we have not revolted against God in the outward acts which proclaim the profligate to be a great sinner, yet the thoughts of our heart, and the words of our lips, are swift witnesses against us that we have continually transgressed.*

Spurgeon goes on to mention another category of sinners noting as he does that Christ died for us although our sins were aggravated. Under this category of aggravated sin he mentions Christians who have sat under the word of God who have heard sin preached against. *Remember sirs, he writes when you sin you do not sin so cheap as others: when you sin against the convictions of your consciences, against the warnings of your friends, against the enlightenment of the times, and against the solemn monitions of your pastors you sin more grossly than others do. ...But even for such, Christ died – for men who have sinned against the wooings of his love, against the strivings of their conscience, against the invitations of his Word, against the warnings of his providence – even for such, Christ died, and therein he commendeth his love toward us, that he died for sinners.*

He then calls upon his hearers to reflect on the fact that when we were sinners we were sinners against the very person who died for us. *Tis strange, tis passing strange, tis wonderful, that the very Christ against whom we have sinned died for us. If a man should*

be injured in the street, if a punishment should be demanded of the person who attacked him, it would be passing strange if the injured man should for love's sake bear the penalty, that the other might go free; but it was even so with Christ. He had been injured yet he suffers for the very injury that others did to him. He dies for his enemies – for the men that hate and scorn him.

I hope by now you can perceive and appreciate the marvel of this confirmation of love. When you remember his broken body keep in mind that you are the one that contributed to the breaking of his body. When you remember his shed blood, keep in mind that your sins brought the whip upon his back and pressed the crown of thorns into brow and drove the nails into his hands and feet.

When you remember, then, what he's done and what you were and what you deserved then you can't help but conclude that his love for sinners has certainly been confirmed. There are those, you know, that feel that because they've suffered in this life or because they haven't been as well off in this life as others have been that heaven will be the place where they will be vindicated and there will be an equality there that will bring others down and boost them up. Such thinking supposes that God owes us something – that God is somehow indebted to us.

The truth is that God owes us nothing – nothing, that is, but everlasting condemnation. We haven't been saints, you see, we've been sinners. We haven't been keepers of God's law, we've been rebels against God's law. We have great cause for praise and thanksgiving this morning that we have not received from God what we deserved but instead of receiving what we deserve *God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us.*

There is yet another aspect to consider when it comes to the confirmation of Christ's love. We've considered the means toward this confirmation of love as well as the marvel of this confirmation. Let me say a word now about:

III. The Strength of This Confirmation of Love

In Romans 8:35 Paul asks the question *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?* A few verses later Paul answers his own question - *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38,39).*

What a strong confirmation of love Christ has demonstrated. His commitment to his people is strong. His watchcare over them is sure and he will never lose any of those for whom he has died. He has paid too high a price for them to lose them.

This doesn't mean that the Christian sails through life on flowery beds of ease. Far from it – in that same passage in Rom. 8 Paul says in v. 36 *As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.* We are tried – we are

sorely chastened – we are engaged in fierce and prolonged spiritual conflict. And the reason for such trials and conflicts is because our Savior was tried and went through conflicts and we are being conformed to his image. And if we had any doubts about the strength of his love for us we would be swallowed up by those conflicts. We would be downcast and defeated.

But when we know the strength of our Savior's love then Rom. 8:37 becomes true of us - *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.* How important it becomes for us, then, to know the reality of Christ's love for his people. The success of our spiritual conflicts is contingent upon our knowing and believing and being convinced in the depth of our hearts that God has commended his love toward us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us. And because God has so commended his love for us in such fashion you must know dear Christian that nothing can separate you from the love of Christ – no power in heaven, earth, or hell can separate you from that love.

This communion feast that was ordained by Christ for our good serves to remind us that God has commended his love toward us. God, you see, never wants us to forget that he has commended his love toward us. And he never wants us to forget the manner in which that love has been commended. Christ's body was broken in order that you might know that God loves you. Christ's blood was shed that you might know how deeply and how strongly he loves you.

The price that he has paid for you to demonstrate his love toward you should serve to convince you that nothing will ever separate you from that bond of love. And if this communion feast will be made effectual to your soul then it will be the Holy Spirit's ministry to shed abroad in your hearts the reality of this love. Is this not what we long for and what we need?

Being as feeble as we are and as weak as we become at times in our faith, God has given us this communion table so that we may have reality ministered to our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is the author of all spiritual reality. And so I trust that you will enter into the reality of God's love this morning.

I trust that you will in reverence and awe marvel at the love that has been confirmed to you and that your reverence and awe will be magnified as you consider what you deserve from God but what you've received from him instead. May the Holy Spirit himself write the words of this text on our hearts in words that are blazing in fire – *God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were sinners, Christ died for us.* And may we, in our participation of the Lord's table say back to him – *My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine; For Thee all the follies of sin I resign; My gracious Redeemer, my Saviour art Thou; If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus tis now.*